

BORDER ENVIRONMENT COOPERATION COMMISSION



CONSTRUCTION OF NEW WATER TANK IN HEBER, CA. FORMS PART OF THE HEBER WATER TREATMENT PLANT IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT.





Border Environment Cooperation Commission

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BACKGROUND

The Border Environment Cooperation Commission (BECC) is the result of efforts by the Governments of the United States and Mexico to address the environmental and human health problems that exist along their common border. The BECC is an international organization created in November of 1993 to promote the conservation, protection, and improvement of the environment in the U.S.-Mexico border region, through the development and certification of environmental infrastructure projects in a framework of sustainability and broad public participation. Once certified by the BECC, a project can apply for funding from the North American Development Bank (NADB) or other sources requiring such certification.

The BECC is authorized to consider water pollution, wastewater treatment, and municipal solid waste management projects and projects addressing other related matters. Other related matters include hazardous waste, water conservation, hookups to water and sewer systems, and waste reduction and recycling. In the autumn of 2000, the Boards of Directors of the BECC and NADB authorized both institutions to expand their work to new sectors of environmental infrastructure. The purpose of this initiative was to allow for better use of NADB's lending capabilities and provide greater opportunities to apply BECC's innovative practices. Projects related to air quality, transportation, clean and efficient energy, and municipal planning and development, including water management, may also be considered for development.

BUDGET

The BECC's operating budget is funded by contributions from Mexico, through the Secretariat of the Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT), and from the United States, through both the Department of State and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). In addition to its operating budget, the BECC manages the Project Development Assistance Program (PDAP), which is funded with contributions from the USEPA. This program allows the BECC to use grant funds to support border communities in the development of their water and wastewater projects.

ORGANIZATION

In 2003 the BECC's structure continued to include a Board of Directors, an Advisory Council and a binational Management team. BECC's governing body is its Board of Directors, composed of ten members (five from each country), which represents the three levels of government and civil society on the border. The BECC's Advisory Council included 18 members (nine from each country). The BECC's General Manager and Deputy General Manager are responsible for overseeing the institution's daily operations.

A general diagram of the organizational structure of the BECC is shown below.



PROJECT CERTIFICATION PROCESS

The BECC's primary role is to develop and authorize projects, which are subsequently funded by the NADB or other funding institutions. To fulfill this role, the BECC gives primary importance to technical and financial aspects of each project, such as the use of appropriate non-polluting technologies with low operating and maintenance costs, and a viable financial structure that reflects affordable rates. Additionally, BECC makes a significant contribution to the project development process by ensuring project information availability, broad public participation and implementation of sustainability principles. The Commission also facilitates coordination between different government agencies at the federal, state, and local levels, in order to ensure that projects comply with the requirements and standards of each institution.

The certification process begins with an Application for Project Certification received from a Project Sponsor (normally a local community). The Application is submitted to the Rapid Assessment Process (RAP), where the existing conditions are evaluated so as to establish the comprehensive need to be

addressed by the project. During the RAP, a Project Strategic Plan (PSP) is developed which reviews the project sponsor's institutional capacities, identifies possible obstacles for implementing the project, defines a potential funding strategy, and determines the technical assistance needs to achieve certification. It ensures that the efforts and activities of the project sponsor and participating agencies are coordinated and described in a detailed project schedule, an important tool to guide the timely development of the project. The final PSP and project schedule provide the definition of tasks that are developed into a scope of work to be procured for consultant services, which secures the support services necessary for the development of the project.

The Planning and Environmental Assessment, Public Participation and Financial Feasibility phases determine the recommended action to address the environmental infrastructure needs defined during the RAP. Technical, financial, and environmental studies are conducted for the project. These studies include the evaluation of project alternatives in respect to technical and financial feasibility and impact to the environment and human health characteristics of the community. The efforts to meet the minimum sustainable development criteria are initiated during this phase and important milestones are accomplished such as rating technical alternatives with the participation of community representatives.

These efforts are supported by on-going public participation activities including the establishment of a local steering committee and development of a community participation plan, which describes the outreach strategy to achieve public support for the technical and financial aspects of the project. The community outreach includes project information availability and distribution, providing presentations to local organizations and scheduling at least two public meetings where the details of the project are discussed.

Once appropriate environmental assessments have been successfully concluded, final design for the project may begin. During the design process, both sustainable development and community participation efforts are continued which may include community awareness programs for conservation and responsible use of resources along with important design reviews by utility operators. It is also during the design phase when project cost estimates are developed to a level appropriate to continue the financial feasibility analysis, which includes developing rate studies and a final financial structure to construct the project. The results of these financial studies are presented at the final public meeting and the community is given updated technical information for the project's implementation. Successful conclusion of this process provides documented compliance with BECC criteria. After a final general public comment period, the project is presented to the Board of Directors for certification and subsequent funding by the North American Development Bank (NADB) and other funding sources.

THE PROJECT CERTIFICATION PROCESS



PROJECT DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (PDAP)

The BECC's Project Development Assistance Program (PDAP) assists communities in planning and designing water and wastewater projects along the United States-Mexico border. Funding for these projects comes from the USEPA, which has awarded the BECC US\$36 million. To access PDAP grant funds, the project sponsor must demonstrate a need for technical assistance and be eligible for Border Environment Infrastructure Fund (BEIF) assistance. The USEPA is involved in the disbursement of these funds only when the contract amount exceeds \$500,000.

SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE

The BECC also provides technical assistance for the development of solid waste projects. These funds have been allocated from the BECC's operating budget.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR NEW SECTOR PROJECTS

Limited funding on a case-by-case basis is available to support the development of new sector projects.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT MANUAL

In 2002, the BECC developed and implemented a project management procedures manual, which presents a systematic overview of the procedures that a project must successfully complete before being submitted to the Board of Directors for certification. This manual, being a more uniform approach to BECC's project development process, provides a blueprint allowing the BECC's staff to define particular duties, responsibilities, and tasks during each phase of the project development process. The manual defines a quality management plan, which specifies quality control activities, such as contract reviews, consulting services control, documents control, and procurement follow-up, ensuring compliance with BECC's procedures and criteria. The manual allows for greater control and effectiveness in the development of each project. A copy of the manual may be obtained by contacting the BECC.

INSTRUCTION BOOKLET – "HOW TO COMPLY WITH CERTIFICATION CRITERIA RELATED TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT"

With the purpose of facilitating the understanding and implementation of sustainability principles, the BECC published an instruction booklet. The booklet is intended to assist engineering and environmental consultants, as well as project sponsors and community residents. The compliance process is detailed as a step-by-step approach to accomplish the tasks necessary to meet objectives of the sustainable development criteria. More specifically, instructions are provided to describe how and when to incorporate community input in the selection, review and ranking of technical alternatives proposed to meet the community's need. Examples of indicator worksheets, validation exercises and rating activities are provided as an additional tool. A copy of the booklet may be obtained by contacting the BECC.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION MANUAL

The BECC Public Participation Manual for Border Communities and project sponsors was created in 2002 as a basic tool that offers practical techniques and methods to guarantee meaningful public participation. The manual synthesizes, applies and improves on the experiences gained by the commission the past seven years. The manual is organized for planning and implementation and is based on the premise that public participation will improve decisions and the decision-making process itself. The manual is a response to the challenge of an ever-changing border region where the trend is for increased public participation in decisions that affect people and future generations. A copy of the manual may be obtained by contacting the BECC.

